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# THE TRAGEDY IN GUYANA

No single event in November filled more news space overseas or commanded greater editorial attention than did the death of People's Temple members in Guyana.

Commentators blamed the tragedy on everything from "madness" in California to lack of a tax on church groups in the United States, from faults in a materialistic American society to failures by State Department and CIA, or even to modern society in general.

The existence of "too much freedom" in the United States was cited. Many observers viewed the events from their own cultural or political perspective. A few saw signs of a "plot" against Jones. Several saw the hand of U.S. politics in the affair.

And one paper, Santo Domingo's El Sol of November 27, printed a psychologist's charge that the "big play given by U.S. news agencies...constitutes a smoke screen to minimize the assassination of civilians by the tyranny of Somoza in Nicaragua."

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## SOME THEMES AND EXAMPLES

1. The United States--or capitalistic society--is to blame.

Tokyo, November 28: Asahi--Many of the People's Temple followers were poor blacks seeking a better life. Mainichi--"At the back of American society lurks the potential for such horrors as witnessed in Guyana. It is the tragedy of an ailing America....Unless we are vigilant, the American tragedy of today may be ours tomorrow."

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Rome, November 28: Leftist Il Messaggero--"The dogged determination with which the American press is attacking...Jones' memory...continues in an attempt to destroy (his) message and to absolve American society from any guilt."

Istanbul, November 28: Leftist Cumhuriyet--"(This) event is not religious, mystical, or extraordinary....It is an event whose source lies in socio-economic reasons, in a social system in which pitiless competition is sovereign, where alienation, loneliness and fear have come forth in striking fashion..."

Jakarta, November 24: Independent Kompas--"...A kind of escapism needed by a highly materialistic (U.S.) society...or a phenomenon derived from spiritual poverty? In it we can see how unlimited freedom destroys the very freedom that is humanity itself."

Algiers, November 27: Government-owned El Moudjahid--"Whatever it is these young people (were) looking for, their disarray and their incomprehensible acts...show that capitalist society has no future. What a contrast with the beaming youth of the socialist countries! What a contrast with our work camps for the young!"

2. Was it California--or failure to tax U.S. churches?

Netherlands, November 28: Prestigious Het Parool--"The line which links Charles Manson's 'family' and Jim Jones' 'People's Temple'.. blooms more abundantly in California than anywhere else...'Anything goes' in that state." Catholic conservative Het Binnenhof--"enough is known about the jungle of so-called religious practices in the United States to justify the most deep-rooted suspicion. There are signs of a sort of religious Mafia, and religion in the U.S. can mean big business. One aspect is that in the United States, religious organizations operate tax-free."

Santiago, November 24: Conservative El Mercurio--"It is interesting to note that strange religious sects appear mainly in California..."

3. Criticism of the State Department or CIA.

Rome, November 28: Leftist Repubblica--"It is hard to understand why American consular authorities in Guyana never sent a negative report..." Pro-Communist Paese Sera--"...Guyana is teeming with American religious sects...carefully watched by the U.S. Embassy and by CIA. A Congressional investigation...will try to see if the CIA has exploited any of the sects for political purposes."

Port of Spain, November 26: Trinidad Express--"It is hard to escape the conclusion that the two governments had some kind of agreement to allow the Jim Jones lunatic sect to run a separate state within Guyana's national boundaries without being subject to the laws of Guyana."

4. Such a tragedy could happen anywhere.

Buenos Aires, November 24: English-language Herald--"The sort of person who in the United States will participate in an emotion-sodden revival meeting will, in Argentina, bang a drum at a Peronist rally when such outlets for man's discontents are permitted....Blind passion is certainly present..."

Tokyo, November 28: Moderate Yomiuri--"Such a mass suicide is quite American in nature, but we, too, should be anxious...for modern society is afflicted with a deep-rooted sickness..."

Rotterdam, November 25: Leftist Vrije Volk--"Moscow's reaction in describing the drama as 'a symptom of America's notorious life-style' is interesting. How many millions of Russians died as a result of Stalin's paranoia?"

London, November 25: Weekly Economist--"The mass suicide of several hundred members of an obscure American religious-cum-political sect...is not just another example of (any)...American tendency to violence....It is...an extreme and therefore distorted manifestation of a much wider change that is happening to the world.

"...Familiar forms of organized religion have lost their hold on most people...of the educated middle classes. (Possible exceptions: Islam and Roman Catholicism)...Secular heroes...Lenin, Stalin, Mao, even Marx...have begun to

lose their appeal. Instead, a groping has begun for new forms of spiritual experience....It is a period of experimentation and, like all such periods, it is disorderly, hopeful and terrifying....The search for new forms of spiritual experience...is in its early stages. It will sometimes go terribly wrong, as it did...at Jonestown."

5. Possible political implications.

Paris, November 28: Television--"Now many Americans are asking questions, not only on the nature of the sect but also on its relations with the political parties. In fact, this 'holocaust' emphasizes the strange relations that increasingly exist in the United States between the political parties and God..."

London, November 27: Conservative Daily Mail--"...In a nation now firmly enslaved to the herd instinct, isn't it at least faintly possible, and worrying, that the sheep, prodded by the electronic crook of television, could one day make a man like Jim Jones president?"

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